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ABSTRACT

The language experience approach is a reading methodoloy that is highly organized, highly structured, and very systematic, but that allows teachers to teach without texts. It is a multiple, variegated set of activities designed to serve one purpose, namely, the instructional use of pupil's own language. As such, there are five interrelated aspects of the language experience approach that weave in and out of daily classroom practice. The first is the alphabet, whose usefulness lies in its letter names. Children proceed from letter names to letter sounds, especially with vowels. The second aspect, writing, includes "invented spelling," a spelling that resembles phonetic spelling but has more profound origins. The breakdown of the rote recital of the alphabet into its component letters allows words to be spelled on a letter name basis that should lead, in later grades, into formal, accurate, and correct spelling. Key vocabulary is the third aspect. It is a highly structured process in which the teacher elicits a personal word from the student in a specified, organized way. The fourth aspect,though not necessarily in this order, is that of the experience chart. From ideas presented by the students, the teacher writes on the chalkboard or easel the transmogrified ideas, repeating each word as it is written. The final aspect, the use of trade or library books, relates both to the language experience approach and the self-selection or individualized reading approach and involves children in reading books that they choose and like and reporting their reactions to the teacher. (HOD)

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THE CASE FOR THE LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH AND INDIVIDUALIZED READING.

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for;

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THE CASE FOR LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH AND INDIVIDU ALIZED READING.

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When the roll is called up yonder many years hence, when distant, and presumably objective,observers evaluate the current reading scene,they could hardly fail to notice the overriding concern for the use of commercial material in the teaching of reading. It is curious that the prominence of major figures in the field of psycholinguistics , as Frank Smith Kenneth Goodman and others, have not appreciably broken the strangehold of commercial publishers upon the school market. Not that such individuals have not had a major impact, PHILOSOPHICALLY upon reading, for they have justifiably earned recognition on a world wide basis. Yet withall that the sales of readers,even more restrictively on a one text, one company basis, as opposed to multi-text adoptions, goes inexorably and exceedingly profitably,on.

It is true, I think, that the language experience approach is in greater favor than previously. It is hard to see why there is any argument about its effectiveness in early reading. But individualized reading, on the other hand,the only systematic instructional program based upon the use of trade books, has indeed been throttled by various forces in the educational world.

Teaching reading without a reader,or teaching writing without a text, arouses terror in the hearts of many teachers. It is unfortunate that this is so, as teaching literacy without a text is not difficult. It is just different.There are two approaches that are frequently used to describe such strategies. 1) the language experience approach and 2) "self-selection", personalized reading or individualized reading. The widespread adoption of these practices would effectively doom the existence of the text book industry,which would strike terror in THEIR hearts. The Catch 22 situation is that commercial companies respond to the market place, but, in this case, they are the ones who,through their sales force and authors,MAKE the market place. Should teachers, for example, learn how to induce literacy in all pupils without the use of texts, the sale of such profitable items would be substantially lowered. The problem is that the practice of language experience and individualized reading is not the most widely understood of methodology in the panoply of education.This paper is an offering to correct this situation.

To accomplish this task, may we suggest that the key, the crucial, the fundamental principle is that each teacher, no matter the grade, the subject,or the age,must utilize some aspect of the internal world of the pupil.There must be some kind of personal choice, some kind of individual input into the task of learning the given matter in hand.The act of instruction must be predicated

upon a process that guarantees such pesonal choices. This might be called structure of process, as a teacher must work in a quite prescribed way or be unsuccessful. To cite a structure of process is to cite a total,polar opposite of a structure of content.

There have been many who have been responsible for the imposition of content upon hapless children. But the one who has produced the most seismic effect in this direction has been Bloom (1956) with his various domains,cognitive, affective and pscho-motor. By his monumental analysis of the nature of what children learn, he has itemized, yea, atomized,step by step,the progress of a student in the acquisition of knowledge.As these are addressed to WHAT children learn, they are of minimal utility in the understanding the HOW children learn.Thus hehas provided the behaviorists, the behavioral objective people, the mastery learning folk, the machine programmers with a field day of program development that allows adults to prescribe and impose content to be learned. Never mind that the learnere must be psyched up, must be persuaded, must be "motivated" to learn said content.Each pupil must be convinced by his teacher that he should commit himself to such structured material. The point we are making is that,lacking the spark of the internal world of the child , the "lived world" as Blakey describes it,instructional practice is based on a quite authoritarian principle.All system,all lock step, all planned sequential work and no choice. All organizational patterns to PREVENT personal intellectual development.

But what is the alternative? Most teachers, in fright that they will "miss" something,salve their consciences by following,to the letter, the "domains",or the behavioral objectives mandated by their given school system..For,to most, the idea of basing instruction on pupils' choices is an invitation to mayhem,to disorganization and to chaos. And indeed it could be so! To have a classroom situation in which there is NO system, NO organization, no planned structure of how to control idea output, is to provide an invitation to disaster. Of course, this is the decades old cry against Progressive Education.
"Let-the-little-darlings-do -what - they-please." Dewey was not confused on this matter, but a lot of others were. We wish to present,therefore,a methodology that is highly organized, highly structured, and, indeed, very systematic, BUT allows teachers to teach without texts.

A recent study by the Department of Education in the State of California (1980) might be instructive. Taking all of the state wide reading test achievement results on a continuum from those showing increasing scores to those showing decreasing scores, they randomized a set of schools from the upper and lower 20% ends of the scale. Sending in evaluators to ascertain the reasons for the differences, they found,surprisingly perhaps, that ethnic and economic conditions were not prime. What was crucial was that,in those schools with increasing reading achievement,the teachers had had an input into the selection of the reading program to be used. Further, in those schools,teachers were not rigorously restricted to the manual of the given

program. They were able to use their own judgment in their teaching. Contrarywise,those schools with decreasing reading achievement scores were found not to have involved teachers in the selection of the reading program.The evaluators found complaints on this matter, as well as complaints about the requirement of undeviating following of manual directions. In addition, many of those schools had an hour of mandated phonics, usually of the worksheet type of activity. The evaluators also reported marked differences in morale between these two sets of schools. Those on the top of the achievement ladder revealing far more positive attitudes in all human relationships.

With this introduction as a backdrop to our main presentation that embodies these elements of structured process:i.e. pupil choice with orderly procedures, let us begin with the first of our appraoches, that of lanuage exerience.

THE LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH

The language experience approach is not a thing. It is a multiple, variegated set of activities designed to serve one purpose, namely, the instructional use of pupils' own language. It is profoundly psycholinguistic in that the language that is used is from the persons involved, i.e. their psyches.Psycholinguistics is, as Frank Smith noted, (1973) a field of study that lies at the intersection of two broader disciplines, psychology and linguistics. The content, the instructional material,that derives from the processes and strategies used, is as different as the pupils themselves.Perhaps it is understandable that such

variety strikes fear in the hearts of teachers. One is scared of what one does not know.What, then, are the strategies of the language experience approach?

We feel there are five interrelated aspects that weave in and out of daily classroom practice. The first is the Alphabet, which is learned usually long before the school years as a rote piece of memory. In school the Alphabet should be large enough,with apprpriate pictures,and low enough on the classroom wall to be easily seen by all.The usefulness of the alphabet lies in its letter names. The alphabetic principle (Veatch 1978) or letter name strategy (Chomsky 1970) (Clay 1977) is exceedingly useful..With the exception of the short vowels, with hard "g","h","w", and "y",the letter names trigger off,when ,mouthed,recognition from their sounds. I.E. "Boy" must start with a "b", as "Lake" starts with an "L". The letter name is there to be heard. Read (1975) found that very young children in kindergarten were able to spell remarkably phonetically because of the letter names. Contrary to all commercial phonics programs,he,Clay (1977) and Paul (1976)established that the evidence in children's writing showed that they proceeded from letter names to letter sounds,especially with vowels.

This leads us to another aspect of the language experience approach,that of writing.We refer to writing that is original as to topic by the pupil writer, and includes evidence of what is known as "invented spelling".We need to take space to describe "invented spelling." It has come to refer to that spelling which has

a semblance to "phonetic spelling" but has more profound origins. Piaget pointed out that counting, or number sense, came when rote counting was succeeded by one-to-one correspondence to the numbers, as "8" was 8 beans,or marbles, or something tangible, and "14" was 14 things. Similarly invented spelling is the progress from rote parroting of the alphabet to the concept of "l" is "l" and not part of the phrase "elemeno" (i.e l,m,n,and o) which is the bugaboo of first grade teachers.What must happen is that the Alphabet becomes internalized, hence "invented"just as counting becomes internalized..The break down of the rote recital of the alphabet into its component letters allows the words to be spelled on a letter name basis which eventually should lead,in later grades,into formal,accurate and correct spelling.

The break down of the rote into one-to -one correspondence brings us to the third aspect of the language experience approach, that of the Key Vocabulary, in its classic presentation by Sylvia Ashton-Warner. It is unfortunate that the reading segment of the educational establishment have not recognized the exceptional and unique value of Ashton-Warner's activity.It is a highly structured process in which the teacher elicits a personal word from the pupil in a specified,organized way. But, be it noted, the word is unknown until given by the child.It is,perhaps,the best example we have of structured process as opposed to structured content.

Once the word is elicited, the teacher proceeds to print the word on a 4 x 7 card, as the child says each

letter as it is written.Should the teacher doubt whether or not the child knows the letter, the Alphabet on the wall is referred to. In this way the "l,m,n,o," problem is met and resolved.Blakey (1980)established that the rote breakdown occurred. These potent key words were also found supportive of Fernald's (1943) activity of letter tracing in words.The research shows that after tracing, copying,and other similar activities, children rarely forgot their own words. Veatch (1978) uses the tracing activity to inculcate proper directional patterns leading into later easing of problems involved in changing from manuscript to cursive.Nor is that all. As all reports of Key Vocabulary studies indicate that beginning letters are written first, initial sounds are easily taught using those words 1)beginning with lip sounds,2) with sibilant sounds, and 3) with dental sounds.For example, if a child gives the word "bike", then all children can be urged to purse their lips ala a "b" sound and come forth with other words with the same beginning sound,such as "ball", "Boo", "bottle". "Sun" can lead to "sea", "soap". "Dog" can lead to "Daddy","Top" to "Teeth",etc.It can be seen, then, that the Key Vocabulary is rich in instructional possibilities relating to learning to read and write

The fourth aspect of the language experience approach, tho not necessarily in this order, is that of the well known and respected "experience chart." Despite massive and gross misunderstandings,this activity of pupil-teacher dictation has the greatest potential for teaching reading of any of any of the preceding elements.These charts seethe

with possibilities.and deserve some of our space for attention.

This activity is ,in our opinion,in contrast to the preceding,best for whole class instruction. It admirably lends itself to beginning the school day. All children are gathered to focus on the teacher who starts out with a statement or question,such as "What shall we put in our newspaper to day?" or "What has happened since yesterday that is important enough to write down?"

Thus the teacher elicits ideas from the several children who respond to the above invitation to contribute.After five or six ideas have been offered, the teacher makes a judgment as to which one is the most exciting, stimulating or provocative.This is important as the purpose of seeking ideas is to provide vital and dynamic material from which instruction can ensue. There is no vote needed.No one is rewarded(at least openly) for an idea. The teacher decides.

Going back to the pupil who offered the idea selected, the teacher probes for more details, especially colorful details,that would sparkle up the language. In so doing the teacher is CHANGING spoken language into written language. The teacher transmogrofies the talking modality into the writing modality, which is, after all, the type of language children MUST use in order to read. This is a sore subject with some who are considered language eexperience experts, and who insist that the child's language be recorded verbatim by the teacher. Oral language is not the same as book language. All the reader need do to be convinced of

this fact,is to read an unedited transcript of a speech.It is easily distinguished from a speech that is "read" not "said".

Thus from the pupil idea, the teacher writes on the chalkboard or easel, for all to see, these transmogrofied ideas, repeating each word as it is written.One after another ideas are so transcribed,for all to see,until four or five are recorded.As a result a chart of approximately 60-70 words are available as the finest instructional material possible.What is so good about it is that the teacher, in an organized,non-chaotic,systematic way has turned some of the "lived world" of pupils into prose from which all manner of literary skills can be developed.

What, for example, is possible? Follow these questions that might be asked.

1. Who can find a word that begins like their name?
2. Whose idea was this line? This line? This line?
   Can you read your own line?
   Can you read someone elses line?
3. Who can find some words that are exactly alike? How many? Can you read one of the lines they are in?
4. Who can find a word that rhymes with one you can think of?(Wood ryhmes with good, etc.)
5. Who can read the whole chart?
6. Go some place where you like to write. If you get stuck if the word you want is on this chart or one we did the other day.
7. Let us all read it aloud and see how your voice goes when you come tr a period. Click that period with your

tongue.

8. Think of a story all your own.If you get stuck see if the word you want is up here.

9. Copy all the words you like best.

With these,and a myriad of other questions, it can be seen that such examples of teacher -pupil dictation are loaded with opportunities for learning. They are, as might be said, hot off the griddle. They are certainly highly personal,which is what provides the incentive to acquisition without "motivation" in the psyched up, hyped up sense.

The final aspect or element we wish to present relates both to the language experience approach and self-selection or individualized reading. We are referring to the use of trade, or library, books. These are books that deal with only one idea or concept in some kind of a plot. They are usually written by creative artists rather than professorial educationists. No one HAS to read them. They have a point of view, take it or leave it.They sink or swim on their charm. They are often beloved for their own sake, and most assuredly, force feeding,a la written book reports,makes them hated.

It might be asked what is the personal committment in such material published by commercial companies?The answer is that they are CHOSEN by the reader. Through a set of clearly organized steps beginning with "the Rule of Thumb" a pupil selects a book that is just right for him, and which he likes.The book is read,recorded and then brought,on a frequent basis,every day or two,to the teacher

for an individual instructional conference.The questions used in these conferences zero in on the personal reactions of the pupil to the chosen book.Skills and abilities to divine meaning, to read aloud, to analyze words all are involved in these sessions which are, according to most investigators, highly prized by both teachers and pupils.Space prohibits detailed description of procedures, but the reader is referred to Veatch (1978)(1968)in that regard.

Specifically,though,in reference to the language experience approach, these books are among the best materials available when read aloud by the teacher. As they are replete, usually,with the best, certainly the most readable, of English, they provide an admirable language model for children whose home language is not standard, or is not English at all.Hearing a teacher, theoretically,the best oral reader in the class, read a charming story book gives children an incomparable idea of what books ARE! For enjoyment, for knowledge, for escape, and for drama, and for thrills. Not, as more than one first grader said when asked what reading was,"To keep the place." Trade books put spice in school life. While they can be used as entertainment, they are not necessarily used to entertain. By bringing up the matter of entertainment as opposed to education, we can close this paper by suggesting that all of the preceding is clearly on the side of education,so stimulating, so provocative, so fascinating that it might as well be called entertaining.We have shown how to use the Alphabet, and how to weave letters into word recognition,

into writing skills of penmanship and spelling, how to derive skill needs from dictation provided by the teacher from ideas of friends,how to use library books all alone,all by ones self. No one ever needs to read the same book as some one else unless there is a goal of appreciation to be sought.

In sum, teaching and learning,as we hope we have presented,is firmly grounded on order,on rigor of knowledge acquisition,on system,and on a high degree of personal committment that comes from one's own world of thought, idea and language.With such activities in our schools, a child cannot help but feel that his world is his oyster, and his mind is a glorious instrument that makes his living vital, dramatic, and worthwhile.

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